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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7728  
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHC/DEPT OF LABOR WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUMISTA/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS SANTO DOMINGO 000617

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DEPT FOR WHA/CAR, WHA/EPSC, CA, DRL, EB, EB/OFD/OMA,  
EB/OFD/OIA,  
EB/ESC/IEC/EPC; SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [ELAB](#) [PGOV](#) [ENRG](#) [EFIN](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [DR](#)  
SUBJECT: UPDATE ON DOMINICAN TRANSPORTATION AND LABOR  
STRIKES

REF: A. SANTO DOMINGO 0130

[1](#)B. SANTO DOMINGO 0556

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The launch of labor and/or transportation strikes remains a possibility this week. Transportation unions have maintained their threat to strike in demand of government subsidies despite legal action against their leaders. On March 19, authorities arrested and detained the leaders of the major transportation unions in connection with a March 12 bus attack that left several passengers injured during the start of transportation strikes. Those arrests appeared to be motivated more by political than by legal considerations. The transportation union leaders were freed on bail the next day (March 20). Labor unions continue to threaten strikes if wage negotiations with private sector representatives do not produce results; however, their commitment (or ability) to follow through on those threats is questionable. Labor union leaders set "ultimatums" on March 13 and again on March 20; even though business negotiators offered few (if any) concessions, unions cancelled strikes in favor of further dialogue on both occasions. Although the two sides remain far from agreement, negotiations are expected to continue. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) Ref B reported that transportation unions, labor unions, and leftist community groups had signed a pact to cooperate in a series of national protests, work stoppages, and strikes in demand of each group's objectives. Although those strikes have not yet materialized, they remain a distinct possibility. This cable summarizes the events in the transportation and labor sectors that have transpired since last week, and the factors that will determine whether a national coordinated strike actually takes place.

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TRANSPORTISTAS SUFFER SETBACKS, BUT REMAIN DEFIANT  
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[1](#)3. (U) Refs A and B report on the demands made by organized private transportation providers, or "transportistas," that the government subsidize more of their operations. Transportistas began organizing limited transportation strikes in demand of such subsidies two weeks ago, but suspended their strikes after a serious (albeit isolated) incident in which a molotov cocktail launched at a transport bus injured several passengers on March 12. The incident received only limited coverage immediately after it took

place. Later in the week, public outrage grew after several newspapers published photographs of the badly burned victims, including of one pregnant woman.

14. (U) District Attorney of Santo Domingo province Dr. Franklin E. Concepcion initially ordered the arrest of only two suspects who had been directly linked to the attack. He took advantage of growing public outrage by announcing he would investigate the major transportation union leaders as well. On March 19, Concepcion ordered the arrest and imprisonment of Juan Hubieres, Antonio Marte, Alfredo Pulinario Linares, and Ramon Prez Figuereo, who lead the transportation unions FENATRAO, CONATRA, MOCHOTRAN, and CNTU, respectively. Prosecutors requested the maximum possible sentence of one year of preventative detention for each of the defendants while authorities pursued their investigations.

15. (U) In a preliminary hearing on March 19, the judge overseeing the case set bail for each of the defendants at one million pesos (US \$30,000) and ordered the retention of their passports. The labor leaders spent the night in jail. Family members and supporters posted bail and secured the defendants' release during the early afternoon of March 20. In press statements, the defendants and their families have been strongly critical of the charges filed against them, and have vowed not to be intimidated. They continue to demand the increase of government subsidies for transportistas, and they continue to threaten additional transportation strikes if their demands are not addressed.

16. (SBU) COMMENT: From a strictly legal standpoint, it would be difficult (if not impossible) to make the case that the union leaders played a direct role in inciting the molotov cocktail incident, as the district attorney has alleged. The arrests appeared to be little more than political theater,

designed to rally public opinion against the transportistas, make the government appear "tough" to the general public, and warn the unions against organizing additional strikes. In this last objective, however, the arrests may prove to be counterproductive. Earlier, the union leaders had been operating under damage control mode, trying to dampen public outrage over the bus attack. Now, they and their families are angry victims. Instead of dissuading the unions from organizing more strikes, the government may have needlessly provoked them into a more radical course of action than they had planned.

17. (U) The major transportation unions are meeting during the afternoon of March 20 to determine the next steps. Leftist community groups, who regularly coordinate with the transportation unions, would probably join in national strikes if the transportistas asked them to do so.

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CONTINUING LABOR WAGE NEGOTIATIONS PRODUCE FEW GAINS  
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18. (U) Ref B reports on "last-minute" negotiations between labor unions and business representatives on March 13 over wage increases for private sector employees. Umbrella labor groups representing the largest labor unions had vowed to commence national protests, marches and strikes if the March 13 negotiations were unsuccessful. However, despite the failure of the March 13 talks to produce real results, labor representatives agreed to suspend their protests by a week pending additional, "final" negotiations on March 20.

19. (U) Likewise, five hours of negotiations on March 20 also produced no gains, but unions nonetheless agreed to continue negotiations. Business sector representatives ceded nothing; their final offer remained the same at the conclusion of the talks as at the beginning: a 12 percent hike in the country's minimum wage (currently 5,400 pesos, or USD 166, per month). Business sector representatives continued to assert that wage increases for workers earning above the minimum are outside

the legal scope of the deliberations. Union leaders also failed to budge during the five-hour session. They are demanding a 25 percent pay increase for all private sector workers earning up to 30,000 pesos (slightly less than USD 1,000) per month.

¶10. (U) COMMENT: Despite their repeated promises to strike if "final" March 20 negotiations failed, unions again agreed to postpone strikes pending additional negotiations -- despite the lack of visible gains produced by the talks. This was an embarrassing turnaround. Ref B noted the unpopularity of labor unions in the Dominican Republic, and the chance that a call to strike would not be heeded. Either the labor negotiators lack the will to organize a massive strike or they feel that their bluff has been called.

¶11. (U) COMMENT: As reftel notes, by joining the transportistas in a coordinated campaign, as the labor union leaders vowed to do two weeks ago, the strike would be less likely to be perceived as a failure even if private sector employees ignore it. This factor likely propelled the unusual cooperation between the groups, but the alliance was always tenuous at best. It is possible that the transportistas' diminished public standing after the bus attack forced the labor union leaders to rethink their association with them.  
HERTELL